

WILLIAM A. LITTLE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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TYREE SCOTT
FORMER PRESIDENT, CENTRAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION
FORMER PRESIDENT, UNITED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ASSOCIATION

INTERVIEWEE: TYREE SCOTT

INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

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[00:00:00] **TYREE:** '69, in early 69, I was working for my father at Scott's Electric, and a woman, these Model Cities community organizers was coming around to minority contractors in the city, asking if they would come to meeting to talk about the construction industry, jobs, all the information necessary to run a construction industry. And they were trying to figure out what the problems were, how to get jobs in the industry, both employees and employers. They hadn't put their finger on the problem with anything at that point. They had been some efforts on the part of both the Model Cities and the Urban League to increase the amount of minority employees in the mechanical trades and the construction industry. But there had been no division between the

question of getting jobs for Black workers in the construction trades or between getting contracts for contractors in the construction industry.

So, this woman came in with somebody else, it was two people: an older white lady, who I don't remember her name now, and it seems to me it was a Black man, maybe a younger Black woman, was with her. But I talked with them about coming to a meeting that was going to be held at the—

[00:01:59] **WILLIAM:** AME [African Methodist Episcopal Church] ?

[00:01:59] **TYREE:** No, it wasn't AME, there were some meetings at AME, but this meeting was down at the Multi-Service Center on Jackson [Street] . Oh, I know. It was supposedly—at that time there was a Black contractor from New York by the name of Winston Barnett, who was a big Black contractor. What had happened was he had gotten a lot of money, and subsequent to that meeting, I got to know him pretty good. But he had gotten a couple million dollars from Boise Cascade and in a big line of credit, a couple hundred million from from Boise Cascade. And he was doing projects in New York, and the Bahamas, and Mississippi, Washington, in California, in about seven or eight different locations in the United States. He was really doing a lot of work. But anyway, this guy was supposed to be coming to Seattle to talk to minority contractors. And I'm not sure whether the first meeting it happened, but anyway, we met to discuss the—there was a lot of confusion, we all just went because it was a meeting being called by Model Cities, by minority contractors, and minority construction workers.

So we went to the meeting. It was clear that neither the people who called the meeting or the people who went, had any clear agenda or anything. There was just some discussion about the problems. There were some workers talking about the inability to get work and contractors talking about the inability to get contracts and also the inability to—anyway, I remember this one guy was there talking, and he got up and made this speech, and I thought this must be the guy Winston Barnett, the guy from New York. He made this big long speech about in order to build a house you must have a proper good foundation. It turned out he was a local cement contractor who was just new in town and stuff and made a big speech. But all the social players of the CCA [Central Contractors Association] was there.

But that was like my first meeting, my first community meeting ever. There were some people there who I think were new or friends. We laughed about the meeting afterwards. But then there was another meeting, that was when [?Jean McGee?] , the one who worked for Model Cities at the time, tried again to pull together some kind of a meeting with some kind of coherence. We finally did have another meeting, and this guy, some guy from Barnett's staff came, Winston Barnett's the guy from New York. Some guy from his staff came and talked about the industry and stuff. That was about the third meeting, I guess. But the second meeting, we finally started identifying the problems, the need for bonding, and so on and so on. I was like surprised at how people didn't—I mean, I thought that I would be one of the people there who really wouldn't understand the stuff, but it was made clear to me I was one of the few there who understood. Most folks didn't have no idea about what they were doing. I'm not gonna say that I had an idea, either, I wasn't as clear as I should have been, but people just didn't have any idea of what we should do.

The idea of forming an association of contractors was clear in my mind, anyway, because at that time, Scott's Electric had been able to get a few big contracts and stuff, and we had joined this association of electrical contractors, called NECA [National Electrical Contractors Association] . And I saw right away the way the contractors had banded together and taken care of the interests of electrical contractors, and they were all white, ours was the only Black, the only non-white contractor that belonged to the association. That was in the history of their association. But I had watched the functions of the association, and I knew what it meant. That was the

beginning of like my getting involved and stuff. I started pushing the idea of the contractors organizing into an association of employers.

You don't want me to talk about CCA? That is how I got involved in the stuff that went on.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

Well, after those first few meetings, I started to put forward the idea that we should organize into an association. The other contractors, the other people who were involved with Model Cities, and the contractors agreed that was one of the initial steps necessary in order to start to do some things. At that point I didn't make no difference between employer and the employees, as a matter of fact the line that was being put out, and I went along with it because I assumed that it was correct, was that if the Black contractors were able to get a decent amount of contracts, then they would hire minority workers, and they would also address the problem of unemployment of minority workers in the construction trades. I was really new to the people there, they didn't know me, I didn't know anybody hardly, except for two or three of the contractors that I had made friends with in the last year or so. So there were a lot of people there who were just strangers to me.

They went along with the initial suggestion about an association, but the leadership—well, I was actually elected the chairman of the group and by the third meeting, I think the third or fourth meeting, our meeting was then held at the First AME Church, where I was elected chairman at. That really wouldn't have meant anything, except there was some initial stuff that had to be done, some initial work that had to be done, like bringing the contractors together, finding out what different associations really did. As a matter of fact, CCA's bylaws are patterned after the bylaws of National Electrical Contractors Association. So there was a need to do that kind of work and set up the meetings and stuff, so I ended up having to do that. That was basically like hiring a chairman more so than getting elected, because I could have gotten elected and just showed up at the next meeting. But I took the initiative to read the bylaws of NECA and get them to discuss them at a meeting, find a meeting place, notify the contractors, send out mailings, and stuff like that.

That was the first time that I had ever—I don't think I had ever chaired a meeting before in my life. But that was the first time that I'd had the responsibility of doing that kind of stuff, and I worked quite hard at it those first few months. As a matter of fact, it took a lot of time from Scott's Electric and a lot of money, because we didn't have any money at the time. It became clear to me that I knew about it as much about it as other contractors knew about it. So they would listen to me, I was able to put forward my ideas and stuff, and they would go along with it. So that went on.

I started to understand the larger part of how the industry worked because of some contacts I was making in my role as the chairman of the CCA at that point. I didn't really—I hadn't come to the conclusion that we couldn't solve the problem by approaching the bonding companies and approaching the state and approaching larger employers and convincing them to hire minority workers and give bid bonds to minority contractors. It was like going through the whole process, talking to the bonding companies, this took place over a period of a year, that I came to the conclusion that the trade unions knew what they were doing in terms of keeping Black workers out, and the state in fact protected the interests of the big contractors, and that the bonding companies were insurance companies whose primary interests were to collect the fee from somebody that need their insurance, and that by requiring large artificial bonds were able to keep down the amount of people in the industry. I mean, I learned all of that stuff as I went along during the course of that year, I was with CCA.

What really happened was each time that we ran up against something and we saw clearly that when there was something standing in the way, we took it on, and we dealt with it. I say "we" because partway through that I

hooked up with Harley Bird and other people. But each time, we dealt with it honestly. I mean, any probable contradiction and we would tackle it straight on. I have a tendency to do that. I think that's the proper way to approach stuff when something comes up, to take it on and do it the best way you know how, do it honestly, that's how I think. Even though like a lot of times we didn't use the best approach, we didn't understand, we were basically honest in our approach and that's how we were able to build community support in the CCA stuff. And I think that's how we moved to higher levels, each time that we ran into that kind of contradiction, whether it was a contradiction inside of CCA, like contractors versus other contractors, or whether it was deciding that there had to be a UCWA, whether that was a good idea. Each time we ran up against something, I did personally, I looked at it myself and said, "Well, that don't work that way, if you keep doing it that way it ain't going to work, and this is why it don't work," and would try to figure out another mechanism to make it work.

And of course, I already talked to you about what happened to the CCA. When I saw that that was the case and had time to think about it, then UCWA came into being. The whole question of like the law, I spent a lot of time learning the use of Title VII, what Title VII of the Civil Rights Act meant. When we got involved in the U.S. vs. [Ironworkers] Local 86 case, we learned how to do that. And that's basically been a lot of work. UCWA is basically built around the Title VII case, plus other cases we brought since then. At some point, I came to the conclusion that you can't use the law. The law is just like in the case where we figured out how the state dealt and protected the interests of big contractors, we saw that the law was in fact only providing, I mean, only addressed itself to the problems of sharing with white workers, that we could never solve all the problems of unemployment by using the law. At that point I started to look around for something that made more sense. I needed to figure out what the real problem was. So I came to the conclusion that the problem was the economic system that we live under, and I took the time to study that and figure that out.

[00:15:07] **WILLIAM:** Okay, who did you study with, and when did you take time out to study?

[00:15:12] **TYREE:** Let me see. I think I came to the conclusion because we effectively used it. In Seattle, we went from like ten people in the industry to five hundred in a period of four years. So we effectively used the law, and then we tried to do something with it elsewhere.

We went to the South. During the course of that, we were able to take it from—when we started in the South, we took the law and brought the lawsuits and stuff, and we started to see how cumbersome it was, and we knew the limitations. We knew all we could do was get a certain amount of people into the industry, and there would be unemployment, there would still be all the other problems. That's about the time that I started to look at it and try to figure out, if that ain't the solution, then what is the solution? That must have been at the end of 1973, no, the end of 1974. Because I came from the South at the end of '73, and I was really happy with the results of what we had done in terms of getting all those lawsuits filed, folks were really ready to organize and rally around the question of suing employers and stuff.

But I knew that Seattle was like four years ahead and what the dead end was here. All that we ran into was the use of the law up to that point, and then we hit a loggerhead, or that those guys would go from underemployment to being employed and happy in the industries, the construction industry in this town. The factory that pays really well in the South, so then they get promoted and all of that. We also knew that with the results of those guys in Seattle having gone in to the trades, having gotten good paying jobs, the result of that was they didn't automatically take on the social issues that affected the community. They didn't work at UCWA or contribute to UCWA or deal with other social problems. So then, we had to start looking at what happens

now in the South and Seattle, how do we get the people in the South not to make the same mistakes that we made in Seattle in terms of not having a social consciousness or whatever.

It was about that time that I started to read about the questions that came up, how other countries deal with it. I think that until that time I really had the same chauvinistic attitude that the United States was the most advanced country in the world, and I would clarify that now before I even go on. When I was in China, the Chinese talked about the American worker being technologically the most advanced worker in the world, the socialist being the most backward in the world. And I believe that it is true, I support that theory whole-heartedly, except for that point. I assume that there was no difference between technological and social advancement. I assume that we were both advanced technologically and socially. So when I started looking at the question of what happened in China, what happened in Russia, what happened in Europe, and started reading the history of the American development of this country, the trade union movement and whatever else, then it became clear to me. I finally put it into perspective that one was the middle class analysis of the problem, of the employing class and the working class.

From that point on, I just started looking further, and I started reading stuff. Again, I read about the Chinese Revolution, the history of the Russian Revolution, the history of the development of the trade unions in the United States, the development of this country. And—what's the name of that book? Oh, I read political economy, *A Sharp Course in Political Economy*, written by some Russian, I can't remember his name now. That starts to define and to explain to you the relationship between those two classes and stuff, and I started to understand that one produced and the other took the product of what the producer produced. Then I started reading classic Marxism, Karl Marx's classic writings. And it became clear to me that there was no solution to the unemployment problem, to the other social problems under capitalism. And I've since then read a lot more, of course, and gone to China and looked at that situation. Basically, I make a Marxist analysis of the situation now whenever I come into a situation. I have to figure out like what it is, what is happening. Does that make any sense to you?

[00:21:19] **WILLIAM:** Yeah. Let's back up and go back to the organization and the fact that development of a new clientele beyond the traditional clientele, going back to I think 1973 or 1972, during the Seattle Community College demonstration, I think June—what is that? I don't know what date that was...

[00:21:51] **TYREE:** It started June 1st.

[00:21:53] **WILLIAM:** June 1st, what year?

[00:21:54] **TYREE:** 1972.

[00:21:54] **WILLIAM:** 1972. And you began to pick up a new clientele, meaning you begin to get white workers in the organization.

[00:22:04] **TYREE:** No, we didn't. Up until now, based on being in the trade and belonging to the trade union now, that's what we intended to do, is to try to develop some kind of relationship with white workers. But we've never had any—we've had support from the white left, not white workers.

[00:22:32] **WILLIAM:** Okay, let's put it that way, let's deal with the white left. You started developing support from the white left and developed a certain amount of relationship.

[00:22:42] **TYREE:** Yeah. The relationship was developed with the white left, and I don't know if that's a good definition of it. But the white left movement gave support to both CCA and UCWA from the very beginning. They came from different segments of the community, both university types who were based in counterculture, and in retrospect, probably from the very beginning, the Communist Party, the CPUSA. I don't think I was aware of them in the very beginning, but certainly by 1972. I mean, UCWA is a workers organization, a "progressive workers organization," so they were giving that kind of support, physically showing up and lending ten or twelve people. I'm sure in 1972, I'm positive, there were some independent mouses around the RU, for example, the Revolutionary Union. There were people from the RU involved in 1972. As a matter of fact, they played a very divisive kind of role in the June 1972 stuff. Larry [Gossett] probably talked to you about that, too.

[00:24:21] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, but how did it affect you, not the movement but you personally?

[00:24:25] **TYREE:** I was really turned off by it. As a matter of fact, it set me back for a while. I'm sure they were making their own kind of analysis of what we were doing and stuff, and had they had a different approach, probably would have been able to reach some of the leadership in UCWA and talk about addressing it. Like, one of our demands then that UCWA have the right to dispatch the apprentices, who we couldn't get these guys to stay on their jobs, and they wouldn't give dispatched when they should have. Remember I discussed that before? Well, that was our major demand we put forward in '72, the right to dispatch the apprentices. People from RU like who considered themselves Marxists, you would think I was clear on that and we could say, "That's a really good demand, here's why..." try to have some sort of class analysis. They were very chauvinistic, and rather than do that, they would come around and say, "You're wrong on this, you're wrong on that. You ought to be doing this over here." Of course, we had our latent racism in us, too. Our position was "To hell with you. We don't want nothing to do with that."

And then there was the Progressive Labor Party, who rather than support us, was very critical. It was something that we had made a class analysis of the problem and was a progressive worker organization. And of course, what we were doing, we were just trying to get, make employment work for Black workers. We hadn't made no analysis of class situations, we were dealing strictly with the race question. And so what the Progressive Labor Party did was wrote a bunch of leaflets about how opportunist we were, the UCWA was a bad group, the group had agents in the CIA and the FBI, that kind of stuff. Not only did they write the leaflets, they had the audacity to come to the mass meetings at St. Peter Claver and pass the leaflets out. But we basically ignored them, we didn't get into a fight or shoving match, anything, we just ignored them.

There might have been other sectarian groups like that around at the time, but I just know about CPUSA, about RU, and about the Progressive Labor Party. But I can say that that didn't have no effect on me at all. I mean, it had an effect on me, cause it made me—well anyway, I'm not just talking about the Progressive Labor Party, I'm talking about RU. But the folks from RU were supporting us, they were in the meetings all the time and putting forward positions and arguments and talking about setting up certain kinds of committees and doing things in a certain manner. They were trying to develop democratic centralism in a very undisciplined group like us. Well, there was all the suspicions of both leadership in the UCWA and other supporters about white radicals and who they were and stuff. So we were kind of skeptical about going along with any kind of like demands that they put forward, ideas or whatever, even though I'm sure there were some suggestions that we thought was good that we decided to do.

I developed friendship with some of the people that I basically have had a cordial relationship with ever since. I remember once I was going to the South. At the end of that whole thing in September or so, I went to Texas and Colorado and spent about three or four weeks just diving around the Southwest, took some time off. Anyway,

when I got ready to leave, this woman gave me a copy of Mao Zedong's Little Red Book, very indoctrinated. I take it, and this is like giving you a Bible, saying this will straighten you out or something. I politely took it, but I didn't crack it. I mean, I had looked at the Little Red Book before that, all those nice quotations that made a lot of sense. But I mean, Confucius' statements make sense if you read them outside of context, too. But I still know those people, they supported UCWA this past winter with the demonstrations, so the relationship has been kind of distant, but I have gotten along with them. I think I still do.

But that's not where—it wasn't until the end of 1973 that I started to look at trying to figure out what I thought was the basic inherent problem with this society. And I don't think that it came from my experience with those people, I think I think that might've caused me to be really suspicious of Marxism, because I was judging Marxism by those people rather than the other way around. What I did was just talked about 1973 there and developing a new constituency. So I'd say we didn't develop new constituents, that we had support from the white left, the unsolicited support, as a matter of fact.

In the last year, I think—well, I'm not going to say a specific time, I was going to say about the time those demonstrations took place last year, last December and January for UCWA—there was another whole group of other people there who we developed relationships with. The leadership people in UCWA developed a relationship with some independent radicals, or white radicals, or Marxists or whatever. That was a very different kind of experience, as a matter of fact, a whole different kind of relationship that developed out of that. First of all, we had made some analysis ourselves about that time and came to some conclusions of our own. And they were other people running around looking for some answers to the questions and were probably the same level we were and didn't belong to some sectarian groups or anything. That's, as a matter of fact, when I met Phil, in December of last year. I think he was in the same situation we were in. He was looking around to see what the solution to the problems were, just like we were. There was six or seven people like Phil that I met during that period of time. Some of them, I'm still close to them; and some of them, I don't ever see them, but they're still around. And then the white left had, of course, grown.

[00:32:28] **WILLIAM:** In what way?

[00:32:31] **TYREE:** There were a lot more people in RU in '74 than there was in '72, for example. And so RU was around. As a matter of fact, other groups had thrown them out of their meetings and stuff about that time, the [Black] Panthers threw them out—well, I guess this was a little bit after the Joe Hebert stuff. Do you remember when Joe Hebert's killing took place? The RU got involved, and the Panthers threw them out. El Centro de la Raza, a Chicano group, they threw them out of the Centro. I'll tell you, I met a lot of people through the Seattle Liberation Coalition, and RU had been thrown out of there because of their sectarian positions on stuff. But I have seen it growing, a group like that can't [urgently?] come to Seattle. It has grown, it has grown a lot. It might've been—I'm going to say relative—it might have been five people in '72, now it is twenty-five this year. But basically there was a lot of the Robby Stern's, I don't know if you know Susan [Shacker?], but a lot of [Mark Raben's?], a lot of independent people who had made some kind of class analysis and was around that I developed a relationship with last year that I still have a relationship with now.

[00:34:01] **WILLIAM:** Okay, what effect did it have, this developing new relationships have on your relationships within the Black community?

[00:34:13] **TYREE:** Well, we're looking at it in the context of the past year.

[00:34:17] **WILLIAM:** Well, let's go back from '74 until now.

[00:34:20] **TYREE:** Yeah, I mean, that's the year. Look at it from December to this year, I wouldn't know. But if you take the Church for example, Mount Zion [Baptist] Church, that's where we had the demonstration at, we stopped the church [construction], that was the main thing that Reverend [Samuel] McKinney played on, the question that these white people were involved in these demonstrations, and this was a Black issue, that kind of thing. I think that's been—the people who look at it from that point of view probably think that that's a bad thing. The best way to answer that probably would be to talk to [?McKinney?] about the Black community and specific people. I think probably in the Black leadership in the Black community that did a lot of harm. I should make some kind of analysis to show you what I mean.

The Chinese asked us a question when we were over there about how we got along with the middle forces. I said I don't get along with them, and that's basically true. Their position was you can't win without them, so you better get along with them. That's basically the Reverend McKinney's. I got along with Walter Hundley, for example, and I get along with Jerome Page. But I'm sure there's unnamed people in the Black community who have probably looked at me personally, and were very much turned off by that kind of relationship. Their thing is, "Those come into our neighborhoods and our communities and try to take over stuff." As a matter of fact, Reverend McKinney made a very inflammatory statement like, "The UCWA is now being ran by white people," that kind of statement. I don't know whether he believes that or not, but I'm sure that there are people who listen to him who think that.

So that's been like in the past year, but even if you go back beyond that, my ignorance about not understanding the relationship with the middle forces in the community and stuff. I think I've become—I've started to see the kinds of roles that those people play. For example we went to the South. What we did was went around and talked to Judge [Charles] Johnson, talked to Reverend Leroy Brown, who I've got a lot of respect for, like different people in there. We had figured out the role that they play in the communities, not always approving of them, but we had figured it out. I didn't have no sense to understand that it's important to maintain a relationship with them, so as a result of it, I charmed them. I would never go to social, those kinds of bourgeois social activities. The last time that I had gone to one, as a matter of fact, was when the Urban League put something on at the Heritage House where they had Ben Hooks, the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] guy. He was so absurd and so agnostic, it was just ridiculous, and I spent the whole time laughing at him. Consequently, the people who were there, even though they didn't see that, but that type of attitude had been prevailing in me for the last couple years, the last three years or so. And that was incorrect.

The reason that it was incorrect is [because] those people, even though they might be into something for all the wrong reasons, carry a lot of support in this community. And you don't have to be Christian to have the Christian support, for example, or Baptist, let me put it like that. The Baptists and the Methodists all march together. Instead of being a hundred, there's two hundred. So they had to coalesce. Well, we should have understood the same thing, but we were more radical than that, I was more radical than that. Consequently, I didn't hang out in places where the middle class folks hung out at, whether it was the Heritage House or the Hindquarter [Restaurant] or whatever else. So I really didn't see those people, basically. I just didn't see them.

[00:39:09] **WILLIAM:** So what you did was in the early days, you made the connection and you went back East, but when you came back, you came back to Seattle—

[00:39:16] **TYREE:** Oh no, I didn't think about the South, I was going to say like how we understood the role they played and should've made an analysis of it. This was before going to the South, that I hadn't kept a serious relationship with these people. The fact that I was an electrician, I was a godfather, I was close to them. But I just cut them off, didn't have anything to do with them. I was close to McAdoo, and I didn't see him like a

year, or over a year. They weren't involved in stuff at that point, and I hadn't done the class analysis, either. I was into proving the way they went about talking about change.

But knowing the role that they played, and especially because we went to them when we went to the South, we made all those contacts with those people who had relatives living in the South. So we went to the South, that was our entree to the South. Judge Johnson, for example, his brother was the head coach at Arkansas A&M—no, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. The fact that he introduced us to other people, who we either needed to know or needed to work with us, was invaluable. Even though he was a football coach, there wasn't nothing there but being a football coach, folks in that town respected him. And therefore, when we went to talk to Lawyer Hunt, the entree was Coach Johnson.

So understanding that I still didn't make the analysis that it was important to work with the middle forces here in order to maintain that kind of united front politics. They all agreed that the construction industry discriminates, they all agree that unemployment is high, they all agree that police brutality goes on in this community, they all agree that education is screwed up in this community. So it was a mistake that I made, before I even made a Marxist analysis of the problem. As a matter of fact, it was, in terms of the Marxist analysis, incorrect to do that. The Marxist position is that you must maintain that kind of united front. Actually, it was Lenin's position rather than Marx's. I was into radical politics, and that's what the result of it was. I think if anything, if you talk about it in terms of me personally, what was a detriment to me in this community was I isolated myself from those middle forces.

[00:42:13] **WILLIAM:** So in other words, you are beginning to talk about isolation from those middle forces, you are talking about the problem of trying to relate to bourgeois Black folks. And if you take a pure Marxist position, you deal only with the workers.

[00:42:31] **TYREE:** No, that's not what—

[00:42:35] **WILLIAM:** Unless you don't consider Blacks part of the—not doing a class analysis in the Black community.

[00:42:42] **TYREE:** No, Marx talks about them being a petty bourgeois element that can go either way. That's the way he put it down. Mao I guess really—and I'm sure that Lenin talked about it also. But Mao Zedong always maintained the united front with the Kuomintang, with Chiang Kai-shek, because the principle contradiction, the principle enemy up until 1945 was the Japanese, and so it was important to him to maintain a coalition, maintain a united front with the Chinese bourgeoisie, which was represented by the Kuomintang or Chiang Kai-shek, to fight the Japanese. After 1945 when the Japanese lost the war, that contradiction was resolved, and another one appeared. The new contradiction, the primary contradiction was the Kuomintang, the national bourgeoisie of Chiang Kai-shek, and they took him on.

But I started acting like Jerome Page was the enemy and not understanding that Jerome Page and I had a particular thing in common, that we should be addressing that.

[00:44:05] **WILLIAM:** That is racism?

[00:44:06] **TYREE:** Yeah.

[00:44:07] **WILLIAM:** So in other words, bring the racism that precedes class?

[00:44:11] **TYREE:** Well, racism is like, is part and parcel to it. I mean, they're not separating out—just because of the economic situation of this country, folks who are victims of racism are also, by the way, victims of economic repression, also.

[00:44:36] **WILLIAM:** But you to, in order to fight economics, you have to deal with race first.

[00:44:43] **TYREE:** Yeah, you can't skirt that. You can't skirt race, but you've got to deal with it. I ain't trying to talk to you about—I've read the history of people trying to do that.

[00:44:50] **WILLIAM:** Okay, let's hear it then.

[00:44:53] **TYREE:** By and large, the white left, for example, what I've been telling you tonight about me and the white workers. I mean, I can try and unite with him, and have principled unity with him by like working really hard, letting him continue to be racist because I want him to unite with me against the boss. But he's still going to be racist and let me do all the shit. Then at some point, I mean, what happens is if there's a winner, he's the winner, and not me. And I represent Black and he represents white. So if there's a winner in my and his struggle, I end up the loser, and he is the winner, because I ain't never dealt with the race question. I'm always going to be right behind him. So both of us are part of the same class, both of us are part of the working class, and we both have to be emancipated together. He can't get through without me, and I can't get through without him. However, we have to unite to do that, we can't do it no other way except to unite, I believe that. But there must be a principle of unity. It can't be a unity that's based on the economic question, it has to be a principle of unity, and there can't be no racism in it.

That's why if you make a Marxist analysis of the question of the schools, the school integration question, it's proper to fight for quality education. It is proper to fight for unemployment, to end discrimination in employment, that we have certain rights that should transcend racism. So it's alright for a group of Black workers to fight the question of employment discrimination, even though that ain't the major contradiction. But you've got to solve them before you can get to the next one. If you can't work, you can't feed yourself.

[00:47:08] **WILLIAM:** So you've got to deal with basics before you deal with the bigger question.

[00:47:12] **TYREE:** Yeah. In Mao's selected writings—I don't want to keep falling back on this kind of stuff, but talk about how they did it. There was a minority question in China, but the example I use now isn't about that. The example is about the cadres that were trained in Yunnan. They come out of Yunnan, and they go off to educate and teach the masses of the Chinese people. And so these cadres would come out of Yunnan and go to these cities. The example I use is one in one city and another in another city. The group in this one city said that, "Imperialism, capitalism, and the national bourgeoisie is our enemy, we must unite and fight against it," and they throw their slogans out all the time. There was another group in another town who said, "Imperialism, capitalism, and the national bourgeoisie is our enemy, and we should unite and fight against them, however, we have to care for this priest in town." The result of it was that they had to recruit people from these cities for the Red Army. So basically what was happening was this one cadre in this one town was serving the needs of the masses, the other one was throwing out slogans. And so when the time came to recruit for the Red Army, in one town they got fifteen or twenty people, in the other town, they got thousands of people, because they were serving the needs of the masses. They were repairing the streets, they were making sure that the crops were planted and harvested properly, and dealing with lowering the taxes, and all that kind of stuff.

The UCWA could be an organization—and I dare say we damn near became that—who threw out all the slogans that the white man or capitalism or whatever else. But what we want to raise is the problem, and

therefore we ain't did no social work in getting the job, all you have is a cause. And people say, "Well, why should we come there to hear the slogans?" Our problem was we needed the job. So you've got to deal with those kinds of needs, but you can't do one without the other. See, if their one cadre had gone out to that town in China and just dealt with repairing the streets and not dealt with the political question, they would have been a Neighbors in Need. A lot of poor people get hungry here. But they dealt with repairing the streets, planting the crops, lowering the taxes, and the political question. While in UCWA up until 1974, we dealt with repairing the streets. We didn't deal with the political question. And the result of that, everyone had cars and better houses, those folks who got in.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

...cause honestly, I need a minute for that point. That statement means that out of bad situations, you

can make good situations out of it. [pauses] I can tell you exactly how I think that works now, just in terms of like Black workers. Somebody might look at our situation and say that we are, in fact, the most deprived and the most oppressed workers out of all the others: the white workers, the white male workers, the white female workers, and the Black workers and the Black female workers. What we end up with, is because Black workers have been the most oppressed, tend to be the most advanced workers. Let me try to explain that. Well, I think that Black workers are the most advanced workers. I can even break that down in terms of like sexes.

The white worker tends to know how to go from unemployment lines to the job. If he's laid off at, Boeing he goes in the unemployment line. They know nothing about how you work welfare. They never made—I mean, the average Black worker that you run up against is always down on the boss, where you might find white workers supportive of the boss quite often. You don't find the same kind of analysis being made about every white worker, because he ain't never had to struggle with the same kinds of things the Black worker had to struggle with: a higher amount of unemployment, the ability to live on less amount of money. It's just more prevalent among black workers, and therefore, he's figured out how to operate in this society in the worst paying jobs because he's had to. And so that's the situation here, where Black workers are much easier to organize than white workers.

That's the situation where you got a lemon that you can make lemonade out of. Black workers right now in the union I belong to are starting to now provide the leadership in [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] Local 46 that white workers will not provide and, by and large, will end up following, cause we made an analysis, and for one thing, will put forward in our position that's in opposition to the white workers. We started the raise stuff today and even started to raise stuff inside the unions. So that lemon is gonna turn into lemonade just by having these guys who understand that the union ain't operating in their interests all the time. The white workers are assuming that the union has. When I say white workers, they are advanced white workers, of course, but I'm talking about the average white worker versus the average Black worker. So anyway, that's what I meant by that. But I wasn't talking about that then.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

...the question of lemonade. Black are able to like—not because we're Black and innately able to do it, but because of our oppression, Black people are able to not just sloganeer the question of politics, but we're forced to live it anyway. And so historically the white left has come from a petty bourgeois background anyway, and so have been very hollow. This parallel is in China with Lin Biao. I mean, they're good at slogans, but they ain't able to like hook up the day to day work with the slogan. Even though whites have made the class analysis much stronger than we have in Seattle—I'm talking about us—our use still is not a workers organization. They

have no base in the working community and are not able to talk to white workers. They have their slogan, they don't deal with the problems of the worker. And so because Black workers don't have the kind of organ, the UCWA can develop. That's another example of just the fact that we were forced to deal with [?the white man?] because of our oppression. I was talking about it because I was trying to say that this sloganeer, he don't listen to that. All you talk about is what the problem is while not being able to deal with day to day problems at the same time, and by and large, the white left has not been able to do that.

[00:56:34] **WILLIAM:** So what you're suggesting is that you are playing with—well, your strategy was one of trying to maintain a good relationship and rapport with the middle forces in the Black middle class, in order to maintain a viable organization.

[00:56:52] **TYREE:** That should've been.

[00:56:54] **WILLIAM:** But you didn't—

[00:56:54] **TYREE:** No, I didn't do it. What it amounts to is that I disapproved of the approach.

[00:57:06] **WILLIAM:** That they were taking?

[00:57:07] **TYREE:** Yeah.

[00:57:08] **WILLIAM:** So in other words, it caused you to disapprove, and you didn't relate to them at all.

[00:57:13] **TYREE:** Yeah. That was a mistake, because if they didn't have power to make the decision, they had the power to counteract it. Ultimately, they didn't have power to make decisions external to the community, they still had the power to make those decisions inside the community.

[00:57:31] **WILLIAM:** They didn't have power outside. Did they have veto power in a sense?

[00:57:34] **TYREE:** Yeah. Well, inside they had veto power. I mean it's like, they were not able to decide on the hollow point bullet issue, for example. Every element, basically every element in the Black community was opposed to the hollow point bullet. That came on the heels of the Joe Hebert killing. So they weren't able to get—and the City Council voted eight to one to get the police the hollow point bullets, but they were not able to stop that. But any one of those people: the Urban League, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], they still had the option not to support it in the ghetto. They could have said, "No, we're not going to do that." As a matter of fact, they did that with the Joe Heber situation. Even though they couldn't have gotten anyone prosecuted, they could have supported the demands to prosecute, yet they chose to veto that based on their relationship with the Panthers. So that's the same situation we got into. They could have supported, say, the justice demands of UCWA last winter, but they chose not to do that because we didn't have no relationship. The situation was exactly the same.

[00:58:42] **WILLIAM:** So it's not in their best interest to make a case when they're going to lose.

[00:58:47] **TYREE:** Yeah, but I mean, it's the same thing. It could've been a situation where their support could have caused it to win. But they still have the option not to support something, in terms of the ghetto. So it is a mistake not to define and maintain those kinds of relationships with those people and their organizations.

[00:59:09] **WILLIAM:** So in other words, their organizations somewhat determined your type of strategy to comply? Because if you're going to maintain a viable relationship, then you have to function on the most extreme things in depth, they will accept. Beyond that is to alienate them.

[00:59:24] **TYREE:** But also, see, they go—because they are not really—I mean, if we accept the class analysis, there are basically two classes of people: the employing class and the working class. What they are, in effect, is a non-stable class on the periphery of both of those two classes. They're not ruling class, nor do they relate to and see themselves as the working class, but something in between that. That ain't a real situation, because there's only basically two classes, so they go either way. Some side with the ruling class, some side with the working class. That's something the analysis ought to be clear on and other times winning them over. Whatever amount of influence at that particular time they have, we can try to win them over. That might mean doing something in such a way that they can support it, or trying to convince them that doing it in a very radical way is in their best interests, too. But either way, not just ignore them. I think Karl Marx talks about them as a very dangerous class.

[01:00:39] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, I know. He thought there was a class called the lumpenproletariat and thought they were the scum and talked about it in derogatory terms, too.

[01:00:56] **TYREE:** If we started to make an analysis and talk about specific people, we would see that, that's the key. There are people who go both ways. There are some who always take the side of the Man, but there are people in that same class who end up supporting working people's demands all the time. If you think about some of those people, you'll see that some will come out always supporting working people, and some will come out always supporting the Man. But see, the danger is that they always see themselves in leadership positions and or being able to make statements, they don't answer to nobody. Lem Howell is a primary example of that. Lem will take on any issue in town and then make statements without clearing it with anybody. He's not responsible to anybody. That's basically dangerous, because then people start choosing sides.

[01:02:07] **WILLIAM:** So what you're suggesting is something else: that you can be a leader in the Black community without any constituency. Just because you speak of the public, you become a leader, per se.

[01:02:20] **TYREE:** Yeah, well there's another whole piece to that. People are “professionals” who by nature of them being professionals, don't require no constituency. And then there are those folks who are appointed by the Man. By nature of them getting that appointment means they are somebody, they deserved what they got, and now they're somebody.

Now, I don't mean Walter Hundley the person, because I think more of him than most folks think of him, but the fact that Walter Hundley was appointed the director of Model Cities or the head of the budget for the City of Seattle automatically makes him a leader. In the case of Seattle Model Cities, in the Black community; in the case of the budget situation, in the City. Now, he might have got that because he was a very loyal person to the mayor and did what the mayor said, but irregardless of that, he was still superimposed over us as a leader. Now he could be a good guy or a bad guy, but we get leaders that way.

The church situation is the same thing. The Board of Deacons elects somebody as the minister who heads the church. Now, he might only confine his understanding or his word to the word of God, but he is seen throughout the community as a leader, or is projected as a leader. The newspapers, the newspapers, in fact, appoint leaders. They are controlled by the same segment that appoints the mayor, or that causes the mayor to be elected. So the

white racists who run the Seattle Times, in essence, decide who will be the leader in the Black community by writing about them often enough.

[01:04:18] **WILLIAM:** So you've always got external forces within politics in the Black community, determining the politics. How did it affect you? How did the white politics affect you? Because in a sense, they played the same game with you.

[01:04:37] **TYREE:** That was precisely what happened in 1969. There were probably some accidents in the very beginning, because they didn't know me from nobody else, say, in September 1969. There were people who were involved who they did know. There was Hank Roney, for example, and Keve Bray, whatever role he played, so they went about to project those people as the leaders.

[01:05:15] **WILLIAM:** Well, they kind of canceled each other out. Bray canceled Roney out, and the government official canceled Bray out, essentially.

[01:05:27] **TYREE:** It was a combination of two things, I think, at that point. Number one is they chose to write about the issue. They saw that was—well, probably the way if you look back at it and look at all the situations that existed: the anti-trade union movement of the Seattle Times, for example, was basically a management-owned and controlled and backed newspaper, and [so is] the P-I [Seattle Post-Intelligencer]. So they saw labor as our primary target and discrimination, and they tended to be liberal on certain issues. Even though they discriminate in their hiring, they saw that as a viable issue to put forward, and it was news. That, plus they can never put things in the context of the issue, but in the context of personalities. I was the personality involved in it.

[01:06:25] **WILLIAM:** And a different one, at that.

[01:06:27] **TYREE:** Yeah, right. And also an issue that they wanted to put forward, so that's how it developed. But had they decided that I was going to make a Marxist analysis of the problem, they wouldn't write about it now, and we're doing a more exciting things now than we were then. But now, we're saying that they're the problem, rather than the trade unions. The trade unions are controlled by them and the leadership of the trade unions are controlled by them, but they ain't going to write about that. But that was basically how I came into play, clearly it was the issue they wanted to deal with, and they had to have a personality.

[01:07:06] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, but you articulated a nonviolent one at that. You weren't articulating a violent position, although the things that you shut down contributed maybe to some violent acts, but the direct rhetoric you were postulating at the time was very nonviolent.

[01:07:22] **TYREE:** Well, I think that was probably necessary. Had it been anything different, they wouldn't have been able to deal with that, clearly. But everybody was talking about nonviolence. Nobody in the group, except maybe the extreme left inside the CCA, was talking about violence. But they didn't know that, the press didn't know that.

[01:07:45] **WILLIAM:** Well, I think the press might have known it. The government officials knew that, and the White House knew about that, about the potential for violence. They were very concerned about that.

[01:08:01] **TYREE:** Yeah, and I'm sure that along the way, they made an analysis of who would be the people who would not perpetrate violence.

[01:08:09] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, right. They made that determination. Because there's no way in the world Keve Bray would've done that, because even if you guys would've backed him, they would've locked his ass up.

[01:08:20] **TYREE:** Yeah, they would've been much more harsh. They could've said that they should go away, but they saw it as one that was anti-trade union and operating in their best interest, and it was news. So that's basically how we came into being. I think probably one of the important things was that when we got to—e came up against, as I was talking earlier, a loggerhead, and we saw that wasn't the solution. We made an analysis of it, or we tried to.

[01:08:52] **WILLIAM:** But your analysis was based on some sort of reform type of politics, a reform type of action, within the context of reform. It went outside the context of the traditional American political processes.

[01:09:08] **TYREE:** That's how we moved from one position to the other one. It was first a question of basically Black capitalism, then the question of basically bourgeois rights, employment discrimination, the use of the law. And then finally, after we realized that the law wouldn't go beyond that, we made a class analysis. But we could've stopped at any point along the way. I think that's the Civil Rights mentality. There's some people who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement in 1955 who see the primary problem today is the non-registration of Black voters and dedicated their lives to registering Black folks to vote, but they didn't go beyond that question. What's his name, the guy from Soul City [North Carolina], used to head CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] ?

[01:10:22] **WILLIAM:** Oh, you mean James Forman?

[01:10:25] **TYREE:** James Forman. James Forman never went beyond the question of Black capitalism. We went beyond that at CCA, we went beyond the question of just the law, comparing voting to Title VII, by the end of 1973. I mean, I did, as well as other people I'm close to went beyond that. That's not to say that you oppose small Black businessmen, not to say that you're opposed to using law, we use the law all the time, we bring lawsuits out, that's what we do, but we understand the limitations of that. So we talked about it, and we tried to work with it anyway.

I heard Julian Bond make an analysis on the radio about two months ago, and it surprised me that he hadn't gone beyond that. The analysis he made was there are basically two classes of people in this country, and I thought, "Wow, he is going to say it," and he said one is Black and one is white, and the majority of the white people—no, he said there are two classes in this country, and one is Black, one is white; one is the ruling class and one is the oppressed class. The majority of the white folks are the oppressor class, and the majority of the Black folks are the oppressed class. That was incorrect, that was clearly incorrect. Julian Bond need not go very far in Georgia to see, in fact, all them white folks who are oppressed, all them poor honkies who live up there in the mountains, in Appalachia, all them poor farmers who lose all the time, all the unemployed white workers who've been caught up in the inflation situation, who ain't made no decisions about nothing since they've been on this earth. He could've gone beyond that. I think it's [?incompetent?] of us to go beyond that, we're letting our racism keep us apart. And we've clearly got, as far as I'm concerned we've got a common struggle, and I emphasize that.

[01:12:39] **WILLIAM:** But you always go back to the same thing: racism defeats the need to develop that type of relationship.

[01:12:46] **TYREE:** Well, then you fight racism. When I say we've got a common struggle, that's not ever to preclude the fact that any kind of unity needs to be principled unity. Like, women should not unite with men to

fight on the question of employment unless they're going to be able to share equally in their jobs. And so then sexism becomes a question, that in order to have a principled unity between both male and female and in the struggle, it's got to be on the basis of equality.

[01:13:25] **WILLIAM:** So in other words, what you're suggesting is that you have to deal with it as maybe more of a concrete type of sense that holds up some sort of moral type of thing. How do you ensure that these things will be shared collectively? In many gains you begin to, then you move into a series of coalition politics, and you get right back to [Stokely] Carmichael [Kwame Ture] . Let's go back to Carmichael.

[01:13:53] **TYREE:** I think it's based on principle. I think that the difference—I mean, I don't want to confuse morality or principles.

[01:13:59] **WILLIAM:** Okay, let's deal with principles then. See, I have a problem with principles. There's a point someone from Chicago was saying: "How can a man with principles deal with someone who is unprincipled?" And that's the question you always go back to when you deal with principles. You might be very principled, but how do we know this turkey is going to be principled?

[01:14:27] **TYREE:** Let's talk about it. Let me use the example again of Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek. And we can talk about it in terms of the petty bourgeois elements in the Black community and in the white community, whatever. In 1927—in 1923, the Chinese Communist Party formed a united front with the Kuomintang, that was the party of Chiang Kai-shek. In 1927, the Kuomintang was unprincipled, Chiang Kai-shek was a very unprincipled person. And so they moved on the eight imperialist powers and the Japanese who were there in China and the other national bourgeoisie. See, there was a ruling bourgeoisie and there was the Kuomintang, who was earlier headed by a guy named Sun Yat-sen before Chiang Kai-shek. They were trying to take the power.

So the Communists formed a united front with them. They knew that the Kuomintang people wanted to take over the power and then rule China. So in 1927, the leadership in the Communist Party was so stupid that they allowed the Kuomintang, but they were moving on the cities, they were taking the cities over. Zhou Enlai took Shanghai, for example, and was holding Shanghai. Mao took another city in the south, in Hunan province, they were like taking the country. Well, the communists had gathered so much support in that six year period—and those six years were 1921 to 1927, but the united front started about 1923—that they were so strong, that they were going to end up the leadership. So what happened was that when Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT saw that, they moved on the communists and killed over a million communists.

[01:16:38] **WILLIAM:** Not only that, the West went and took over cities for them, also. They took the cities and turned them over to the Communist Party.

[01:16:49] **TYREE:** That was in the end [of the war] , that was in 1946, the Russians and the—well, the Russians basically did that. But the point is, if you have made an analysis, and I say a Marxist analysis, and understand what the goal is and you set certain guidelines and certain rules, and folks start to break them, folks start to go against that, then you always have to call them on it and fight against it.

To use a concrete example, say that men and women are going to struggle over the question of equal employment at Boeing. And so the women say, "Well look, we don't want for you guys to get all the jobs as the managers and the skilled workers and all of us be housekeepers and maids." So they say, "Okay, that's cool, we're going to do that. Now you women go on out there and be ready when we let you know." And they say, "Well based upon what we just were saying, we should also be involved in the planning and strategies for

making the decisions,” and they say, “No you can’t do that. We are going to go out, we’re going to make the decisions, and when we win, y’all can have some of the good jobs, too.” Well, that ain’t principled unity, because if you are going to be involved, you have to be involved in the decision making and the planning, whatever. And so right then there’s opportunism within the group.

Or the men say, “Okay, we’re going to have principled unity.” This can be like white and Black workers at the same time. So the white and Black workers decide, “Okay, we are going to have Black workers in the decision making and white workers in the decision making and the planning and all the committees and stuff. And when we win at Boeing, we’re going to share the jobs equally.” Alright, so you take the Boeing Company and the white workers and the Black workers made all the decisions about how to go about doing, but after they take it, the white workers then decide that—now first of all, the principle contradiction is the Boeing Company, who wouldn’t give the jobs out equally, right? And so they united, and the principled unity was based on non-racism and all of that, and they took it. Then the white workers decide that, “In fact, we aren’t going to let you Black workers have an equal amount of jobs.” Then the principle contradiction becomes the white workers.

[01:19:32] **WILLIAM:** Of course.

[01:19:32] **TYREE:** Then you take on them.

[01:19:34] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, but the problem with that is if you have a fight to [?win a ballot?] and they get entrenched, then you have to really try, especially in terms of [?numbers?] .

[01:19:42] **TYREE:** Yeah, but that’s exactly what happened in terms of the KMT, that’s precisely what happened there. That’s not what ended the united front. Mao maintained the united front, the Chinese communists maintained the united front through 1945 at the end of the war, because they were fighting the Japanese, who was the principle contradiction. So they fought the Japanese, the KMT was down there fighting them around Shanghai and in the south. The Chinese Communist Party was fighting them in central China.

[01:20:18] **WILLIAM:** Yeah they did, but Mao still had his forces, he never really was totally a fool.

[01:20:22] **TYREE:** No, he never relinquished his forces, he never would. There were people inside the Communist party, [?Wang Ming?] , a very reactionary cat, who was inside the Communist Party, always wanted to give the Red Army to Chiang Kai-shek. But Mao understood who he was, and based on their relationship during that period, he knew who he was. He could have killed him twenty years earlier. But when the war was over with, instead of forming a coalition government with the Chinese Communist Party and the KMT in 1945, they went to it, loggerheads, for they had resolved the major contradiction, the primary contradiction: the Japanese. As soon as that contradiction was resolved, if you read the essay On Contradiction, he says that the only thing constant is contradictions. The minute you resolve one, another one appears. And so the KMT then became the primary contradiction. There were no more Japanese to fight, so they took on the KMT, and four years later, of course, they won.

You try to have principled unity, and you try to fight that way. Then when those folks are uniting and start to do that, then you take them on. After you resolve one, the next one appears, take it on. That’s basically what I was saying about what we went into with the UCWA. But we took on the unions. And when we saw that when we won that, some more contradictions appeared for Black workers, economics becoming a social problem. They got into like driving bigger and better cars and dressing nicer, and so that was the contradiction, and then we had to figure out a way to deal with that. But every time that you take on something, something else occurs. You know that the unity was Blacks in the community and jobs and stuff. But the minute we organized, we saw

contradictions in the organization, the CCA, and the fight took place there. That's how UCWA developed out of it.

[01:22:39] **WILLIAM:** Okay, I think I got enough.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

[01:22:45] **TYREE:** I started talking about—I tried talking about my own development. At about the time, put it in the time frame, by the time that I started working in Denver and later on in the South, I think—if we're going to talk about it, I also have to talk about it in the context of the work that was going on, too, because that's what made me change myself. I was thinking about what we were doing. I think up until that time, I saw what we were doing, what I was doing, was just something that was a very popular issue that I had been involved in coincidentally. The issue with hiring, for example, had come, when in fact, it was the age-old issue. It's an ongoing issue that I got involved in that was addressed in a particular way. But the question, now I would define it as a class struggle.

At that point, we were dealing with it on race lines and the race struggle for employment. And I had that kind of analysis when I went to Denver, that's what I was caught up in. Also, I think that in retrospect, it's very telling because of the phase in Denver. I thought that we had hit on a phenomenon, that the way to address a particular problem, the problem of employment discrimination. And so when we went to Denver, I thought that this idea I could use my persuasive powers to convince the same elements necessary to duplicate the efforts that had been done in Seattle, and of course, that just wasn't true. I didn't have any more talent and skills than anyone else had, and I was fooling myself assuming that I knew enough about the particular issue, the problem, and that explaining it in such a manner, that other people would listen and act accordingly.

Well, of course that just wasn't the case. I think—I was the primary person working in Denver, and there was another person for some period of time, there were young guys who were just kind of tagging along. So having the whole thing come down around my neck was just far right cruel. It made me realize that it wasn't something that I did or a special skill that I had that caused either the work in Seattle to succeed and all the work in Denver to fail. And so I had to look closer at it and say, alright, it wasn't just me and myself. But other people I worked with during that period of time, other people I was working with, we were forced to look at it and see.

I really wasn't sure at that point what made the work in Seattle succeed and the work in Denver fail. As a matter of fact, I came up with the wrong conclusions. And the reason I came up with was that Denver was a different place and there were too many middle class Blacks and not enough unemployment, and later on a lot of other things that were not necessarily the causes. But it wasn't until the following year—I didn't learn right away that the problems in Denver were based on the age-old class problems. I'd already known there were too many petty bourgeois Black people in Denver, and there wasn't enough unemployment, we didn't get certain amounts of support from the community, the bourgeois community and stuff. Rather than make a more clear analysis of it, I was never able to do that, because I never understood what it was myself.

It wasn't until about a year that I started to understand and start to make some kind of class analysis of the problem. Luckily that was before I went to the South. By the time I got to the South, it had been—well, this is important, too: I didn't understand the role that working people play in this society. I was still believing in the whole private property concept, that management has and owns and should have and own what I now understand as the means of production, that working people should go to work for them and make profits for them, and they should share in the employment along with the white workers, Black working people should share along with white working people. I came to the conclusion that—even before I had gone to the South, I

came to the conclusion that that was an incorrect analysis, that working people produce it all, and that the difference between the white worker and the Black worker if you look at it in essence—both of them have to produce the materials in this country in order for it to operate, and both of them only have [?to do it themselves?] .

So it became a lot clear while I was in the South the role that both Black and white workers played. And even though organizing around employment discrimination and Title VII, I started to look at and wonder how to unite those two elements, the Black workers and the white workers, around the question of the worker's right to have some say over what happens with his life. I started to understand towards the end of 1973 that I still hadn't figured out, alright, well what is the mechanism for trying to bring those elements together around some kind of common principle. And we continued to work in the South, but having made some kind of class analysis and learning from those mistakes that went on in Denver, the work in the South was successful to the degree that it could've been, in terms of organizing lawsuits and getting community support and keeping some interest from the workers in the South. And nothing happened in Denver, but it happened in the South.

When I left the South, I think it was becoming clear to me that discrimination, working that discrimination, was not a solution to the problem, nor that discrimination was part and parcel to this economic system. I guess about four months after I had been back in Seattle, in the early part of 1974, was when I started to see and understand the real role the trade unions should play in the society. That's really why I got interested in the role that working people played in Soviet countries, or communist countries. And that probably was how I ended up going to China, why I ended up wanting to go and finally going to China. It ended up most important of all that I see and understand the role of trade unions. Since then, I've done some research on both historically how they developed in this country and consequently understood what happened to them and the role that they played, rather than the role that they should be playing.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

[01:34:59] **WILLIAM:** Go ahead.

[01:35:01] **TYREE:** The way that I see trade unions: first of all, I think that it's important to like get what trade unions are, because when we're just talking about trade unions, at least I tend to just see them as the unions and some folks who bargain for the workers. But unions basically are a coming together of a particular group of workers who unite to deal with the employer. Historically, they united to deal with the employer, but they united to deal with social issues. They united to deal with the economic conditions of demonized workers and their community. It's the organ that addresses the other class of the employing people, of the bosses. Unless you look at it like that, if you look at it in the framework of the union, those folks; there's us, the working people; and the management and the government.

If you start looking at all that stuff, it gets really confusing. But if you just look at it as the people who hire people to work for them, who purchase labor, and if we look at it as those people who work every day, and those people who are working every day come together, then the essence of all the power that exists in this country is right there. I can talk about the general strike in San Francisco, probably the most important one of all. But it started around some longshoremen trying to organize in the 1930's, 1936 [sic] to be exact. But the entire city went out on strike in support of the longshoremen. And in essence, all this machinery that was owned by management was sitting there idle without any workers to operate it. And so workers become the consumers and also the producers.

Once I understood that, then it became very compelling to me then to try to find a way to bring together those elements, those Black and white workers, to try and start taking positions demanding more jobs, irrespective of what it meant to the employer. Demanding shorter weeks so that more people can work, irrespective of what it means to the employer. And every time that the gains are made, to make more demands on the employer, on the employing class, for lack of a better word, to try and put the power in the hands of the working people. And the only mechanism to do that is the trade unions. That's where workers are already organized at, and to some degree, democratic, and on paper, it's supposed to be democratic anyway. So I think that union democracy is the first place to start at. That's the conclusion of five years of work, or six years of work on my part that brought me to that.

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

[01:39:17] **WILLIAM:** How would you go about implementing this program?

[01:39:22] **TYREE:** Well, I think that—well, I'm positive that it ain't nothing new, that other people came to those conclusions, both in this country and outside of this country. People have used outside this country successfully—well, if you look at the role the trade unions played, and I'm not talking about the Soviet Union or China, but in England, the role the miners played in bringing down the [Edward] Heath government, the conservative government in Britain, two years ago. The miners went on strike, making certain economic demands. I don't think that's the kind of thing that we want to do. I mean, it's probably not the proper thing to do, because the conditions in England are even worse. They made [?half ration?] demands, kind of. But they were successful in [inaudible] .

So I think that the role of American trade unions and in particular, those of here in Seattle, UCWA, and myself is a learning process at this point. I see—